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# The Mississippi Quarterly

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# William Faulkner: An Inter-disciplinary Examination

EDITED BY

**ANDREW F. ROLLE**

*Occidental College*

WE LIVE in an age when it has become almost fashionable for academic folk to fraternize across the arbitrary lines of their specialties. In recent years de-compartmentalization of the study of American culture has accompanied an inter-disciplinary approach to knowledge. Since World War II literary specialists, historians, artists, sociologists, economists, musicologists and others have joined together to form the American Studies Association, an organization devoted to such an across-fields study of our society and culture.

This approach is illustrated by a new type of conference sponsored by such specialists, who have been willing momentarily to vacate their fields, while exploring the totality of our Anglo-American tradition. In October, 1955, such a conference was held by the Southern California Chapter of the American Studies Association. Its purpose was to examine the work of William Faulkner, one of America's most provocative living novelists. By bracketing our efforts around the career of one major figure, we strove to achieve unity of purpose, as well as to evaluate the meaning and significance of his work. In fact, we were interested in finding out if it was even possible to assess a man's intellectual contributions from the standpoint of differing disciplines — an appropriate task for an American Studies group.

It was obvious to all the participants that they were dealing with a writer whose work had been appreciated abroad perhaps more than that of any other living author, Ernest Hemingway included. Even before Faulkner won the Nobel Prize for literature, the French vigorously applauded his work. In a recent book entitled *Transatlantic Migration, The Contemporary American Novel in France*, Thelma Smith and Ward Miner indicate how popular Faulkner has been abroad. During earlier years the sales of his books in France consistently surpassed purchases in America. Faulkner's work has also had a profound effect upon European writers. When *Light in August*, the volume upon which the conference focussed special attention, appeared in 1933, French

reviewers spoke of its "overwhelming force," of Faulkner's "profound genius," of his originality and power.

Not all the praise for Faulkner has come from abroad or from persons whose basic preoccupations are literary analysis of his style and form. Many others view him, above all else, as an important interpreter of the American South. As an historian I see in Faulkner a writer who has helped, in a major way, to explain the Southern past. He has taken the time-worn Southern setting and infused it with understanding for us moderns. He has shown us that Southern concepts, character, and society — no matter how archaic they may seem to some — have not disappeared or even withered appreciably. Faulkner rejects the lifeless, trite, almost maudlin nineteenth-century characterization of Southern life. In its place, and without discarding the deep traditions of the South, he substitutes new interpretations and insights. Pillared mansions, magnolia trees, wan aristocratic ladies, and horsewhipped slaves give way to less legendary characters, to flesh and blood twentieth century mortals whose realness can be felt by all of us.

There has, of course, been criticism of Faulkner, and the conference also treated attacks upon Faulkner's fatalism, his curious Puritanism, his obsession with sexual themes, and his "macabre humor and horror," as Albert Guerard labels his own criticism.

Invited to the one-day conference on Faulkner were a literary specialist, an historian, a sociologist, and a psychologist. The conference was an extraordinarily successful one. Both the participants and the audience had previously been urged to read one of Faulkner's most representative books, *Light in August*; this helped create the sort of synthesis that is essential to a good symposium. Each speaker was asked to attempt a brief evaluation of the book, indicating the major assumptions upon which such an appraisal was based. After examining Faulkner's strengths and weaknesses, in the light of varying disciplines, the speakers posed significant unanswered questions designed to "trigger off" lucrative discussion. The following papers raise such questions, and possess the uniqueness of examining Faulkner from different premises. Although all the participants are deeply interested in American culture, their observations are not exclusively literary.

William Faulkner's is a complex personality. Literary analysis alone is not sufficient to an understanding of his work. Professor Scott Greer, formerly of Occidental College, and now at Northwestern University, gives us a sociological interpretation that reveals a penetrating interest in the role of the "poor white" in Southern society. Greer's appraisal is followed by that of an historian, Professor Davis Applewhite of Redlands University, who has done much work on the place of the Southern yeoman in the history of the South. Applewhite has reservations regarding a number of Faulkner's mannerisms, his failure to portray the middle-class Southern white, his exaggeration of the "curse" of the Negro in Southern society, his minimizing of a basic religious orthodoxy peculiarly Southern, and his over-stressing of the lack of purpose in Southern life. Like the other participants in this symposium, Applewhite, however, applauds Faulkner's great literary craftsmanship.

ship. In the next essay a psychologist, Professor Raymond E. Bernberg of Los Angeles State College, looks at Faulkner's personality, methods, and style, as a student of human relations. This contribution is followed by that of a literary specialist, Professor B. R. McElderry, Jr. of the University of Southern California, who has a strong interest in Faulkner and in other modern writers, specifically Steinbeck and Wolfe. McElderry dissects for the reader the exceedingly complicated narrative structure of *Light in August*. The concluding commentary is by Professor Hallett Smith, Dean of Humanities at the California Institute of Technology and winner of the American Poetry Society award in 1952, who proved an excellent commentator. In his summary he displays an ability to draw together many strands of inquiry.

As program chairman of the meeting, I am grateful to the writers of these papers for creating so stimulating a program. I wish also to thank the editors of the *Mississippi Quarterly* for presenting these papers to a much wider audience than could attend the California meeting.

SCOTT GREER

*Northwestern University*

## Joe Christmas and The "Social Self"

WE CAN NEVER ASSUME that a novelist is describing a given society with any accuracy, or even trying to do so; he does not use the same canons of accuracy and intersubjective validity which are second nature to the social scientist. Nor, on the other hand, may we assume that we can study the writer as a social person directly from his work, using the novel as a sort of protocol. He does not use the methods of case study in reporting his own attitude or feelings. Furthermore, so affected are imagination and understanding by the emerging structure of the work, the completed novel may provide no clues at all to the "ordinary" or "overall" social person who has written it. The body of Faulkner's work is, then, no basis for discussing either "The South" or the phenomenon "William Faulkner" with any known degree of confidence.

However, to say that a novelist does not use or need the canons of science is not to imply that he has no canons to guide him. His canon of intersubjective validity is satisfied when the reader accepts and understands the created world of his novel; his canon of accuracy is satisfied when we accept the mass and the fine details of perception and motivation, saying "Ah Hah" as we recognize ourselves, or a possible self. The novelist, like the anthropologist, assumes that nothing human is alien to him; his work is to communicate the human meanings of all manner of events. And, like the anthropologist, his method is the translation of the unknown forms of human life into the common universe of meaning. As this occurs, the scope of the human widens, for the bizarre becomes understandable and the symbolic flow becomes richer.

One value of both the novel and social science then may be stated as the "explanation of humanity to man". The novelist moves towards this goal through imaginative synthesis, evoking a bounded world with its own space, time, and people. The sociologist moves through abstraction, analysis, testing, and the integration of theory.

Both are concerned with the nature of social realities: their methods differ; their frame of reference may or may not be similar.

One possible way to respond to a novel, as a sociologist, is to compare the novel's meaning with the theories a sociologist might use to illuminate the same events. One can translate or paraphrase the evoked drama of the novel and can, perhaps, generalize from this artifact to typical life situations. It is a tricky business, for the deal and the trump cards are all in Mr. Faulkner's hand. He has selected the themes, created the characters (with whatever esthetic power or weakness they manifest), and moved them through the ritual sacrifice of Joe Christmas. Although I have certain reservations about the created drama, they are not serious enough to invalidate the chief characters and episodes — so I accept the story as it stands and shall attempt to communicate something of what it seems to mean within a sociologist's frame of reference.

The three principal characters of *Light in August*, Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and Gail Hightower, are all deeply involved with the Southern image of the Negro, something I shall call "Negroism". Christmas is defined as a white man with Negro ancestry, whose lynching is the hub of the story; Joanna Burden is a white woman who is an abolitionist and whose brother and grandfather were killed as "nigger lovers"; Gail Hightower is a defrocked minister, who has been associated with Negroes in the town's mind and has been horsewhipped and ruined for it. Ninety per cent of the novel deals with these three characters. The story, then, centers around Negroism in the South. However, the story is far from a simple exploitation of violence and pity; the author's cavalier disregard for the tricks of sentiment and suspense is testimony to this. The novel is a prolonged exploration of the meaning that race-identification has, not in limbo, but in a richly realized *milieu*, the small town South.

Jefferson, Mississippi, where the action occurs, is a small southern town, a center for the lumber industry and the distribution and marketing of farm products. As a small town dependent on the people of the fields and forest, it is invaded by the country (whereas the hinterland of the metropolis is invaded by the city). The people of Jefferson are near the physical world of rural work and share something of the fatalism of the countryman: isolated and stable, theirs is a type of social order still common in the rural South though almost forgotten by the urbanites of the great cities. As a Southern small town, Jefferson is also near the backwoods, for much of the South has remained in many ways "near the frontier". A result of topography and history, this has allowed a continuation of an older American order, one in which family and kin are of great importance while the formal agencies of the law frequently behave as dependent forces.

Two other traits distinguish the small Southern town: its nativism and its racial hierarchy. The Southern small town, white and black, is almost entirely "old American". Both white and black are Protestant Christians, and there are few people from the "new migrations" — Jews, Italians, and the peoples of central and eastern Europe.

Consequently, with little new population coming in from the outside, the town is a self-contained group of families, holding dogmas whose origin is in all practical respects "prehistorical" to them. These dogmas, concerning the Civil War, Religion, and Race, are those which seem strange to the inhabitants of other regions. Race is here a given phase of cultural reality, its origins immemorial — a lasting remnant of the hierarchical social order built on land and slaves. The social types produced from that order — the poor whites, Negroes and aristocrats — form the social world of *Light in August*.

All of the results of the demographic and economic character of Jefferson for its cultural system cannot be explored here; certain aspects, however, are powerfully evident in the novel. There is the pastoral tale of Lena Grove on the road, pregnant, trusting, and finding those she can trust. Her story, interwoven with the tragic center of the book, never really touches the story of Joe Christmas; she moves, like the illiterate, proud, and gentle southern folk, around and through the novel. Her story creates, powerfully, that assumption of fatalism, family, and land, upon which the values of folk-societies rest. There is also, however, the religious fury which runs through the story — religion of a specific type: hard-bitten Calvinism, ascetic and agonistic Fundamentalism. There is also the backwoods carelessness with the formalities of the law. Finally, there is the dehumanization of the Negro's status, the unarguable assumption that any Negro by being Negro has acquired a guilt which can never be expiated.

In this place the decisive action occurs. This is superficially curious; Joe Christmas did not have to come back to Jefferson. Joanna Burden did not have to remain there. Gail Hightower was not bound by business in the place where he had been disgraced. But there is nothing arbitrary about the scene: each has his reason. Hightower is bound by his family past, the wild adolescent myth of his Civil War grandfather. Joanna Burden is bound by her traditional family guilt. Her abolitionism is as compulsive and fanatic as the Southern Negroism it opposes; for her the Negro is the white man's curse, his shadow. She believes the white man cannot escape his guilt save by raising the Negro with him, but she is Southern enough to believe he can *never* succeed in raising him to his own level. Joe Christmas is bound here by the ambiguity of his status — his lack of place in the world. Here in Jefferson, if anywhere, is the meaning of his life. He cannot stand the Northern prostitute who "does not care" if he has Negro ancestors or not. Jefferson is the world that formed him and his dilemma. During his wanderings, "He thought that it was loneliness which he was trying to escape and not himself. But the street ran on . . ." Each major character is in Jefferson because the reason for his peculiar destiny is found there "at a climax".

The central story is the story of Joe Christmas. Born in the South, Joe is the son of an unknown circus employee who may have been part Negro; Joe's father and mother are both killed by his Grandfather just after his birth. His Grandfather curses Joe's birth as "God's abomination of womanflesh". Joe's early and formative years



are spent in an orphan asylum, where his Grandfather, with fanatic insistence, gets him defined as a "nigger" by both the staff and the other children, even though his skin is "white".

If the social self develops through intimate interaction with others, the development of Joe Christmas would be atypical indeed, for he has neither parental figures nor a peer group. He is rejected or ignored by everyone. His self develops slowly, obscurely, and without a language. This is a fit beginning for "one of the loneliest men in all literature," as Irving Howe has called him. Joe knows nothing about his origins except that he is part Negro.

He grows to maturity in the home of a fanatic Calvinist farmer, who is incapable of relating to the child as a friend, much less a father. Here he exists in a violent dominance-submission relationship with his adopted father and with contempt and distrust for the adopted mother, who is the epitome of submission. Joe's effort to break away from this family begins in an illicit sexual relationship with a white waitress; significantly, he must tell her that he is a Negro. (It is all the identity he owns.) When his effort culminates in the probable murder of his foster father, however, his lover panics and repulses him as a "Nigger", and he flees forever.

The flight carries him chiefly through Southern cities and through the Negro sections of those cities, but he also moves through the border South and certain great Northern cities. He lives with Negro women and with white, "pulling" his racial identity on the latter after he has slept with them. He identifies with neither. His life is a "long empty street" leading — to Jefferson.

This man, isolated from others by a lack of common human experience, as well as a self-definition which bars intercourse with whites, finds in Jefferson his first close human attachment since his youthful love, the waitress. The person is Joanna Burden, the lonely, ostracized, abolitionist spinster. Their relationship, however, is corrupt from the beginning: he comes like a thief in the night, and she allows him only the back door. Her own pleasure in the relationship is largely a function of her horror — she calls him "Negro, Negro, Negro" in the midst of the sex act, and fantasizes rape. Then her Puritan conscience, whose exploitation has been one of the thrills of the relationship for her, becomes dominant; simultaneously, she reaches menopause. The depth of her revulsion is revealed when she begs him to pray on his knees with her for forgiveness; the depth of her belief in Joe's Negro identity is starkly revealed in the climax of error, when she attempts to force him to attend a Negro college and help her in "ministering to the Negroes". It is at about this point that he kills her. He thinks, "If only she hadn't prayed."

The incidents of Joe's flight and the Sheriff's pursuit emphasize his rejection of Negro and white alike. When they capture Joe, in the words of an anonymous townsman reporting it all to his wife:

"He never did anything. He never acted like either a nigger or a white man. That was it. That was what made folks so mad. For him to be a murderer and all dressed up and walking the town like he dared them to touch him, when he ought to have been skulking and hiding in the woods, muddy and dirty and running. It was like he never even knew he was a murderer, let alone a nigger too."

In Joe Christmas, Faulkner has created a credible character, though not a "normal" one. It is difficult for us to identify with him but the circumstances of his socialization make plausible the lonely man who emerges, grappling in an inarticulate fashion with the problem of his identity. Faulkner is not an intellectual, nor are his important characters, and his meaning must always be inferred from the total dramatic process of the novel. Joe Christmas is not a commentator; he is the *ding an sicht*, the living dilemma of Negroes and Negroism.

His chief problem is that of identity, for, although he considers himself part Negro, he shares the white man's definition of the Negro as something unclean, low, and subhuman. Still, manifesting his stubborn commitment to the only self-definition he owns, he calls himself Negro and shares the Negro definition of the white man as threatening, blind, and terrible. It must be realized that Christmas could easily have "passed" as a white, or lived as a Negro. He refused both. What he wanted, he said, was "peace, to be let alone" — in short, to be human, neither black nor white. His contempt for others, manifest throughout the novel, seems to be based upon their utter lack of understanding of either himself or themselves. His is the insight of the marginal man who, sharing two worlds, cannot identify with either.

The marginal man emerges when societies collide and interpenetrate; when this occurs, individuals are forced to attempt some synthesis of the alien worlds in conflict. Ours is a society replete with such marginality — of race, class and culture. In the case of Joe Christmas, his marginality forced him to seek, in his own consciousness and his own flesh, a solution for the problem of race. Such marginality in the cases of intellectuals has contributed some of the most profound and systematic insights into the nature of man and society — but Christmas is of the "folk", and he must try blindly with the tools of the folk, intuition, hunches, and feeling, to solve the insoluble.

He is thus a symbol, standing for the primitive human intellect that comes, through no choice of its own, to hold in mind differences of time, place, and condition, and, reaching judgement, has little left to judge. Christmas does not condemn, nor even moralize, the terrible behavior which traps him. He is not even his own partisan, for the forces meet within him in a balance that is negation. Faulkner describes his face in death as "not blaming, threatening", but "serene". He stands for Faulkner's compassion, whose roots are in the novelist's objective understanding of the dilemmas, the constraints, of human life in a social world.



Finally, Joe Christmas is a test of human social reality. It is important that nobody knows if he really is a Negro or not. All accept it on faith — the hearsay word of a circus foreman, confronted by a mad old man, on a stormy night thirty-three years before the action begins. However, so rigid the social norms, so powerful the subjective needs, all social reality for Joe Christmas, Joanna Burden, and the townsmen, emerges from this evidence. Faulkner ironically underlines the relation of Negroism to the conditioned values of Southerners, rather than the empirical nature of Negroes. Of Joe Christmas we can only say, "He was a man who thought he was a Negro." (This is probably the most precise possible definition of a Negro.)

As for the needs which have created the violent mythology of Negroism, I believe that Faulkner relates them to the nature of Protestant Christianity. Joe Christmas violently rejects the Calvinist doctrine of his foster father and of Joanna Burden; she, in turn, is driven to her near-madness and death by a guilt couched in religious terms. Hightower's thinking, a chorus and commentary, seems to center around his efforts to understand this Christianity which rejects and condemns him and so many others. And Joe's grandfather, who pursues him like a fury, is a man whose fanatic religion is interchangeable with his fanatic Negrophobia.

Significantly, the action of the story is broken in the midst of Christmas's flight by the revelry of Gail Hightower — himself rapidly becoming involved in the affair. Hightower thinks, as he listens to the Church music at evening:

"The music has still a quality stern and implacable, deliberate and without passion so much as immolation, pleading, asking, for not love, not life, forbidding it to others, demanding in sonorous tones death as though death were the boon, like all Protestant music . . . a single blended and sonorous and austere cry, not for justification but as a dying salute before its own plunge, and not to any god but to the doomed man in the barred cell within hearing of them . . . and in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross. 'And they will do it gladly'. Since to pity him would be to admit selfdoubt and to hope for and need pity themselves. They will do it gladly, gladly. That's why it is so terrible, terrible, terrible."

Rovere, in his introduction to the Modern Library edition of the novel, dismisses the analogy between Joe Christmas and Jesus Christ. As I read the novel, the analogy is less far-fetched than Rovere thinks. And the question becomes: for what reason did Joe Christmas accept his crucifixion, in life and in death? Again, the concept of marginality is useful.

When we look at the cases of marginality arising where societies and groups are crushed and cultures violated, a typical result is the messiah. He is the individual with a "call" to somehow bring together two violently different versions of man's nature and make sense out of

the resulting synthesis; to show the way to the subject people. Ethnographers have documented dozens of cases of primitive messiahs, from the arctic circle to the Great Plains. Such men are also homeless; they have no "race". But Joe Christmas is no messiah. The burden he carries is not the burden of salvation. It is a far heavier burden — the burden of human identity in a world without Deity where the human is lost under the stereotypes of race, class, and culture. It is the burden of knowledge, for this waif without identity is forced, by the logic of his life, to understand more than he can express in the language of man.

Joe Christmas, the person, was created by the same people who destroy him. His genetic background is irrelevant. He might have been "pure caucasoid". It is the social definition of the Negro, the unclean, rejected, and despised aspect of man, which kills him. The strangers without the gates are monsters and must be destroyed; the strangers within are scapegoats to be purged. The willingness to "raise a cross" in the crucifixion seems, in Faulkner's view, to be derived from faith in sin. Such faith in sin, however, is not peculiar to Southern Protestant Christianity; it is a well-nigh universal heritage from the daimonic universe of primitive man, where departures from the familiar were seen as insults to the Gods.

DAVIS APPLEWHITE

*University of Redlands*

## The South of "Light In August"

QUITE RECENTLY an American columnist carried a story of the tour of William Faulkner through Italy as a representative of our best cultural offerings. The writer snorted that this was a foolish policy of the State Department, for Faulkner represented only the decayed South, a region peopled by loose-living degenerates and Democrats. This criticism, bearing the pronounced opinions and hardened prejudices of Westbrook Pegler, might very properly be ignored by the well-balanced except that his point of view is quite generally held by a wide group of people, including both the neo-abolitionists of the East and the outraged "respectables" of the South.

Almost as violent as this point of view of William Faulkner is the defense of him by an increasing band of devotees in all sections of the country. In elaborate, often obscure, and occasionally brilliant terms this group of scholars dig among the prose of the master finding gems of perception and beauty. Any criticism of the man is simply the result of failure by the uninitiated to follow properly the labyrinths of meaning to reach the wider shores of understanding. His South, while admittedly limited in concept, is often compared to the settings of Hawthorne and Melville, who depicted a New England perhaps not quite exact but rearranged to bring out the characteristics of the region and the inhabitants.

But what can the historian find of truth and usefulness in learning of the South through Faulkner's writings, particularly in this *Light in August*? The first consideration must be the already formed point of view which the reader brings with him to the study. In this case the present writer confesses to having lived in the South for most of the formative years of his life, a decade of them in Mississippi. He has visited the town of Oxford and feels reasonably free to draw on recollections of that past to illuminate and illustrate certain opinions. Any prejudices which may creep into the remarks as a result of this background should at least be balanced by an increased appreciation of the many talents of Mr. Faulkner in depicting the region.

The second consideration of importance is to decide just what part of the South the novels describe. With an advance apology to the

sociologists present for treading on their territory, I wish to narrow the field of consideration from the whole South to study almost microscopically a tiny section of one state. Many differences appear between the upper and lower tiers of states south of the Mason and Dixon line. No longer are they united by a single staple crop as formerly, and even their almost religious devotion to the true party of Jefferson and Jackson seems recently weakening as many groups follow strange gods and vote Republican.

It is true that certain ties remain. The majority of the people throughout the South are basically English and Scotch-Irish in stock, and have traditionally followed the evangelical sects with a Calvinistic piety and something of the fanatical devotion, at least in public, to the restrictive mores of the early Puritans. (Mississippi is still technically a dry state.) The doctrine of white supremacy is felt a vital part of life by most of the people, even the well-educated who depreciate active expression of this feeling as largely the personal baggage of the lower class white. There is further a definitely strong clan and family feeling, a loyalty to members of a group with the same blood even when they are not personally liked or respected. And finally there is the endless habit of talking, a soft flood of words from porches, barbershops, parlors, and the corner filling station. Day and night the sound of talking flows on. In this, Faulkner is true to his South.

But what of Mississippi, an area long stereotyped in the minds of most of us as a state with the nation's lowest per capita amount spent for education, of folks who drag themselves from the lethargy of pellagra and hookworm-infested existence for only the excitement of a lynching or the welcoming of some member of the family back from the chain gang or the state insane asylum. Does Faulkner draw even his isolated county of Yoknapatawpha truly? A qualified answer must be given: yes in many respects, no in many others. And the characteristics of his setting of a hill country of North Mississippi are not completely valid for the rest of the state, even for rural areas two counties away.

One thing, however, is unmistakably authentic in the writing, the descriptions of the countryside, at least of the countryside of thirty years ago, and the feeling of the town. Consider, for example, how graphic his simple sentence is. "The mild red road goes on beneath the slanting and peaceful afternoon, mounting a hill." Or, "But the plantation is broken now by random Negro cabins and garden patches and dead fields erosion gutted and choked with blackjack and sassafras and persimmon and brier." A town cottage comes to immediate life. "It is a small lawn containing a half dozen lowgrowing maples. The house, the brown, unpainted and unobtrusive bungalow is small too and by blushing crape myrtle and syringa and Althea almost hidden . . ." While the road may well be blacktop by now, the eroded fields rampant with nitrogen-rich kudzu vine planted by the government, and the cottage freshened by a civic-improvement women's club, still the area is there and springs to recognizable life.

Certainly to a social historian the most powerful aspect of all Faulkner's writing is the manner in which he captures the atmosphere

and feeling of the area; and more than merely describing it, creates vivid personal response. The harried walk of Joe Christmas through Freedman Town, the Negro section, can be felt.

. . . surrounded by the summer smell and the summer voices of invisible Negroes. They seemed to enclose him like bodiless voices murmuring, talking, laughing in a language not his. As from the bottom of a thick black pit he saw himself enclosed by cabinshapes, vague, kerosene lit, so that the street lamps themselves seemed to be further spaced, as if the black life, the black breathing had compounded . . . .

And the contrasting reaction to the streets of white dwellings:

To his left lay the square, the clustered lights: low bright birds in stillwinged and tremulous suspension. To the right the street lamps marched on, spaced, intermittent with bitten and un-stirring branches. He went on slowly again, his back toward the square, passing again between the houses of white people. There were people on these porches too, and in chairs upon the lawn; but he could walk quiet here. Now and then he could see them: heads in silhouette, a white blurred garmented shape; on a light-ed veranda four people sat about a card table, the white faces intent and sharp in the low light, the bare arms of the women glaring smooth and white above the trivial cards . . . .

Such passages could be cited in great number, some with a greater use of adjectives, others with a spare limning of scene, but all carrying keenly the feel, sights, and sounds of the area.

When the historian considers the beings who inhabit the skillfully done landscape of Mr. Faulkner, what conclusions can he reach as to their existence as real people? At this point there enters a division of opinion, for there is certainly a life to almost every character. The speech is caught with an uncanny skill, but to what extent are the figures a truthful picture of those in the area we study? It seems to this speaker that the author has depicted superbly the Negroes, the poor-white, and the small farming class, but that he has ignored the middle class as perhaps the most important group in Southern society. The only two figures in *Light in August* who might be above the general level of the small farmers by education and position are the tragic Hightower and the unfortunate Joanna Burden. Besides, Miss Burden is hardly a representative of the South any more than was Simon Legree, and her downfall, according to the author, was the result of the "fury of a New England glacier exposed suddenly to the fire of the New England Biblical hell." She was outside the mores of the middleclass in her actions as much as she was outside typical Southern patterns of thought.

The plain people are magnificently alive in these pages. Nameless characters, hunched on seats of creaking wagons, move up and down the dusty summer roads. The farmer who watches Lena eating her sar-

dines and crackers as he drives toward Jefferson, having refused her offer to share them with a simple "I wouldn't care for none." Or his uncurious reaction to her search for a husband. The stony but human figure of Martha Armstid who disapproves instinctively of Lena's carelessness in becoming pregnant, and her almost thoughtless expectation that marriage will follow, "I reckon a family ought to be together when a chap comes. Specially the first one, I reckon the Lord will see to that." Yet Martha gives her complete store of egg money to help the girl reach Jefferson and the husband-to-be.

Lena's counterpart is the shadowy Byron, a man from the hills with a strong, almost Calvinist, belief in the rightness of his actions in the face of the disapproval of his only friend Hightower. "I reckon you are right . . . . Anyway, it aint for me to say that you are wrong. And I don't reckon it's for you to say that I am wrong, even if I am." Byron, who moves slowly through the book with his Samaritan complex gradually becoming more Freudian, is not so believable as is the "worthless horse" Lucius Burch, unsympathetic opportunist that he is. Perhaps there are more of the latter type in our society.

With his Negro characters Faulkner is superb. The cadence of their speech is there without any feeling of its being an Uncle Remus dialect. More important for our understanding of the texture of the South, the author furnishes the strange detachment which exists between the lives of the Negroes and whites. It is not simply a segregation of the races but a real separate existence with points of contact in stated areas. The contrast between the "Blacktown" and the "Whitetown" does exist, and even Joe Christmas finds that he is not at home in either. When Joanna asks how he knows he is part Negro, Christmas replies "I don't know it . . . if I'm not, damned if I haven't wasted a lot of time." Ironically, of course, because he never really knows whether he is part Negro, he is suspended between the two worlds. Gavin Stevens commented:

But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the Negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister . . . .

All of the fleeting glimpses of the various Negro characters in *Light in August* have an authentic touch, even the melodramatic scene in the Negro church into which the fugitive Christmas wanders. The casual Negroes who pass and repass the principal characters live unmistakably.

Whether or not the average Southerner feels as strongly that the presence of the Negro in his society is the curse which Faulkner expresses is rather open to question. Consider the words: "The curse of every white child that ever was born and that ever will be born. None can



escape it . . . . And I seemed to see the black shadow in the shape of a cross." These expressions sound more fitting coming from Joanna's tortured soul, and perhaps indirectly from that of Faulkner than as an expression of the feelings of the average middle-class white in the South.

In fact it seems to the writer that the first major flaw in discovering the South through Faulkner's writings lies in his ignoring of the middle class. In *Light in August* there is almost no mention of this solid well-balanced group except casually.

. . . here and there, standing motionless or talking to one another from the sides of their mouths, some youngish men, townsmen, some of whom Byron knew as clerks and young lawyers and even merchants, who had a generally identical authoritative air, like policemen in disguise and not especially caring if the disguise hid the policeman or not.

This could scarcely be a balanced picture of the community life. It would be better to overdraw the figures as Babbitts than to ignore them entirely.

The second major omission which seems to cloud the sharpness of this view of the South is the failure to give any positive value to the strong conservative religious life of the majority of the people. Nowhere in this book is the simple faith of the orthodox churches portrayed except in the nearly poetic musing of Hightower about the early evening prayer service.

Then alone, of all church gatherings, is there something of that peace which is the promise and the end of the Church. The mind and the heart purged then if it is ever to be; the week and its whatever disasters finished and summed and expiated by the stern and formal fury of the morning service; the next week and its whatever disasters not yet born, the heart quiet now for a little while beneath the cool soft blowing of faith and hope . . . . The organ strains come rich and resonant through the summer night . . . .

This is certainly a strong contrast to the unhappy memories of Hightower's frantic sermons full of galloping hooves of the Civil War, the granite Calvinism of the Old Testament-branded bigot McEachern, the chaotic mouthings of the self-called evangelist of hate, Doc Hines. Certainly this latter group does not represent the South as a whole, nor even Yoknapatawpha County.

The third area in which the author seems to depart from the reality of the present scene is in the lack of purpose for living displayed by the major characters. Most of the figures cross the scene erratically, either driven by a fate not of their own choosing, or simply drifting like Lena. While no intelligent reader will question the right of an author

to manipulate the lives and motives of his characters to project the story most vividly, the same readers hope that at least a few of the persons will appear to be self-motivated toward some recognizable goal. Not even the bloodhounds in *Light in August* are able to follow a trail to the end. The possible exception is the brief and horrifying directness of Percy Grimm. Is this true of the South as a whole, or even of Yoknapatawpha County?

How then can one evaluate this book as a source of valid information about the South? It gives a lucid geographical picture of the area of a section of North Mississippi. It serves as a window into the static lives of the yeoman farmers and of the artisans in the towns. It provides many extraordinary impressions of the relations of the Negroes and the whites in the South. And most valuable of all, Faulkner provides the reader with the impression of actually participating in certain levels of the life of the area.

I do not feel that Faulkner is especially trustworthy in expressing the present sentiment of the South, even of Mississippi, about the "guilt" over the Negro question, about the peculiar attitude toward the Civil War, and about the sense of detachment from the rest of the nation. Consolidated schools and the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* have wrought great changes in the direction of conformity to the modern world.

There is still, however, enough difference in attitude to make one final quotation from the book pertinent to the South: "To respect anybody's love for the land where he and his people were born and to understand that a man would have to act as the land where he was born had trained him to act."



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## "Light In August": A Psychological View

UNDERSTANDING a work of art through the interdisciplinary approach is a penetrating and far-advanced system of study. However, the interdisciplinary approach creates a problem in itself because only a rather select group of people can put forth the type and quality of appraisal of an art form which would be a valid, integrative evaluation of the work. After all, the uniqueness of the art form involved and the specialty of its content limits the participation of people from the humanities and the social sciences to those who have experience with and appreciation of the particular art form.

In attempting to evaluate Faulkner's *Light in August* through the methods of the various disciplines represented here today, we must recognize that the path ahead is difficult. Literature from the art world on creativity is full of the concept of the individuality of the artist and his "instinctive—or native gift" of communicating special messages to the world or to specific audiences. In this matter, the humanities and social sciences disagree. In the first place, we do not believe that any special endowments of communication are innate. Secondly, it is believed that the value of a work of art and its meaningfulness extend beyond the intent of the artist.

Thus it is apparent that basic differences in thought exist and somewhat complicate our integration of evaluations. However, mutual understanding can certainly be furthered by meetings such as this.

Before I set forth my thoughts on *Light in August*, I feel compelled to remind you that as a psychologist, I cannot function as a book reviewer *per se*. This is not a psychological area of research or study *per se*. Therefore, my discussion of the book is not a psychological analysis, since such an analysis would most likely assess the content concerning such things as reading ease and human interest as measured by the Flesch Formulae. Then again, a content analysis could be made relating to socio-psychological hypotheses which an investigator might want to induce from the book. Then again, if I were deeply oriented toward the psychoanalytic school, I might apply the dogma to the content of Faulkner's book and therefore "psychoanalyze" the characters, plot and situations. But I am not a disciple of psychoanalysis. All in

all, many kinds of significance through different methods might be applied. Some significant relationships concerning social phenomena might result. But the task would be laborious and of questionable value. I might even conjecture that should the audience be made up of more "lay" people than scholars, my discussion would be expected to take on the glamors of the abnormal pathologies mirrored in *Light in August*.

The frame of reference from which I shall speak is based on individual opinion influenced by the varied literature I have read as well as my psychological background. The personality characterizations, inferred motivations, behavioral situations and story interest are factors of paramount importance in my appraisal.

In my opinion, Faulkner's personality characterizations are in most cases well done. For example, Christmas' need and value systems are so comprehensively depicted that we are aware of his motivations to such a degree that we might be able to predict his behavior at each step in the story. The murder of the Burden woman seems to suggest an aggression to destroy. It would be interesting to know just what Faulkner had in mind here. Did he consider that Christmas was destroying in the woman a whole value system in which he could not participate because of his belief that he possessed so-called "nigger blood"? Or did he consider that Christmas was destroying a trap which had engulfed him and would have required him to accept the so-called "nigger blood" idea by being openly and finally identified as a Negro because of her wanting him to go to a Negro school and practice law with a Negro? Would this be a final outrage against which he had fought all his life? Committing the murder seems a natural result of the conditions Faulkner constructed in the story. What precipitated the act as a more direct causal force is not clear.

Some critics, I understand, consider that Faulkner is overly concerned with sex as an integral part of his themes. I am not familiar enough with Faulkner's works to make an evaluation. At least this book does not appear to be overburdened or over-delightful as you may feel with this sort of thing. Certainly the part sex plays is somewhat complex, yet I would imagine that it should be with a good writer.

After all, sex in process, growth, and indulgence plays a major part in our lives. How could you leave it out? Some have questioned whether the Burden woman's sexual overactivity with Christmas makes her a nymphomaniac. I think the answer is no. Nymphomania is more evident as indiscriminate as well as overactive sexual indulgence in a woman. I think Faulkner, at this point, was over emphasizing for coloring, a contrast in this woman's behavior as a change from abstinence. Other bits of sexual concern are involved in the whole story. By comparison with the over-reaction of the Burden woman, we have Byron's sexual passivity. Byron was "picking up the crumbs," so to speak, from Lena. He was getting nowhere, and in contrast to the abundance which others experienced, Byron in true life frustration was getting nothing.

The castration of Christmas is an interesting type of symbolism, one incidentally that is not new to contemporary literature. However, the violence of Grimm appears to personify a pent up aggression — al-

most psychopathy — a final act of outrage signifying a hysterical step to destroy. I believe Lewisohn's *Trumpet of Jubilee* typified the same sort of thing with the part where the Jewish lawyer is turned in by his secretary to the storm troopers. Their final act with him, also, was to castrate him.

I consider the Lena-Bunch saga a clever, whimsical satire. Where we see in Christmas the aggressive-pursued personality, Bunch stands out as the passive pole on this personality parameter. Here are two strong opposites which Faulkner weaves forcefully through the body of the story, creating a sharp contrast of personality. This ability to show contrast is an important element in Faulkner's insight into personality organization. The variety of characterizations and their integration with each other throughout the story is reminiscent of Dickens' works.

Lena is the only character of importance who is rather sketchily portrayed and therefore seems almost incongruous with the other main characters who are so intensely depicted. Yet she is an important vehicle to communicate the continuity of the life process. The theme of the story which evolves about her is never saddled in a morass but is persistent in its purpose and gathers momentum as the story unfolds.

Lena's placidity, especially portrayed in the final chapter, is in marked contrast to the brutality and intensity of human relations of the other characters in the preceding chapters. Although the final chapter may seem to present a somewhat comic situation in Bunch's attempt to possess Lena, there is a pathetic undercurrent of futility in the whole situation. In the midst of all the stress and turmoil surrounding the other characters, Lena, even though outraged by an anti-social act of a weak, irresponsible drifter, remains unperturbed and is willing to accept whatever happens.

Christmas, on the other hand, besieged by unsubstantiated fears of having Negro blood, lived intensely and violently. Because of a distorted perception of social values, he was unable to achieve any sort of self-fulfillment and the resulting aggressions led him only to self-destruction. Here there might even have been a motivation somewhat masochistic in form.

Hightower and Grimm are hackneyed characters in American literature, with Hightower personifying the distorted, neurotic, confused preacher and Grimm the stereotyped personality of "America First" with the narrowness and prejudices thereby implied.

Faulkner appears to use Hightower as the spokesman for his own philosophy. Through Hightower we are exposed to "psychologizing" which covers the decadence of the family institution in southern society at that time, the purposes and frustrations and imbalances of marriage, the persistence of a punitive super-ego, the complexities involved in serving religion, etc.

Faulkner's artistry is displayed in the greatness of his creativity, the organization of the structure of the book, the telling of the story, and his tremendous skill in describing inter-personal relations. The suspense of the plot and its constant interweaving and final denouement

illustrate a superior power in the use of language. The death of Hightower is poetically expressed and seems to stand isolated as a vignette of word relationships in contrast to other passages which are plain and direct. Faulkner's skill in the use of words is almost overpowering at times. Witness the "thundering hooves" passage, a configuration of experience and feeling like a tone picture aesthetically portrayed.

Faulkner's form of story telling is contrapuntal — an interesting means of weaving in and out, backwards and forwards and at different levels all at the same time. It is fascinating to see in literature what is exciting also in music. At times Faulkner seems to present a level of comprehension of content and feeling followed by a different level which, as a change of pace, is almost symphonic in form. If this is new in literature, he has created a form which in development might well create an experience for appropriate audiences as contrapuntal thought in a structural, harmonic sense. It is almost a phenomenological approach to an event built up from each character. By giving credence to Faulkner's use of this form, we could say his contributions are psychologically sound.

*Light in August* raises the interesting yet age-old problem in communication — the taste of an audience in this communication area, or, in psychological terms, the problem of interest. The limitation of story content and its complicated manner of presentation restrict it to a limited audience. The racial problem inherent in the story has unquestionably been pointed out and handled in far superior and simpler ways. The content in general is not what could be considered "intoxicating." Interest provides the motivational aspect of an audience within the total context of the social statement which a work of art makes. It provides the closure of audience-artist relationship for the purpose of optimal communication. Without this interdependent relationship, the human communication process will break down. *Light in August*, if it meant to purport a significant social statement, yields no light, whether in August or October, though it may have been obscured by Faulkner's circuitous method of presenting the story. Since this was such an early work of Faulkner's, perhaps the criticisms are too severe to apply to his total work, but in relation to this specific work, they seem justified.

An interesting question is whether Faulkner merely attempted to write an exciting mystery story or whether he actually was attempting to express a social statement. Experience with "art-forms research," mostly in the fine art area, has revealed a startling divergence between an artist's intent in communication and the interpretation by audiences. Richards, in his work in England some years ago, found highly varied interpretations of lesser known poems of well known poets. He felt this was due to lack of training of the audiences, but his criterion of training was his own personal insight into their meanings. Current psychological theory holds that perception of the content of a communication is controlled by the two dominant processes of projection and identification. If the content is not readily accessible based on an individual's prior experiences, then the interpretations which result are more directly a result of an individual's personality needs projected into the content.

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## The Narrative Structure of "Light in August"

*Light in August* is now regarded as one of Faulkner's major novels, and it is doubtful if any of the others combines so richly the easy natural comedy and the violent tragedy of which Faulkner at his best is a master. Consider the perfection of the brief dialogue early in the novel when Lena Grove confronts Byron Bunch at the lumber mill, expecting to find her pseudo-husband:

"You ain't him," she says behind her fading smile, with the grave astonishment of a child.

"No ma'am," Byron says. He pauses, half turning with the balanced staves. "I don't reckon I am. Who is it I ain't?" (Modern Library edition, pp. 43-44)

Or consider the terrible scene in Hightower's kitchen, when Joe Christmas, the escaped murderer, is cornered and castrated by the incipient storm-trooper, Percy Grimm:

When the others reached the kitchen they saw the table flung aside now and Grimm stooping over the body. When they approached to see what he was about, they saw that the man was not dead yet, and when they saw what Grimm was doing one of the men gave a choked cry and stumbled back into the wall and began to vomit. Then Grimm too sprang back, flinging behind him the bloody butcher knife. (pp. 406-407)

*Light in August* was first published in 1932, and it is interesting to speculate on how differently Faulkner's reputation might have developed if this novel had been quickly reprinted in the Modern Library

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— instead of *Sanctuary*, included in that series the same year, and thus for a long time the most easily accessible of Faulkner's novels. Not until 1950 was *Light in August* added to the Modern Library, and most of the serious discussion of the novel has appeared within the past ten years. Interpretation has frequently been concerned with symbolical implications. Thus Richard Chase wishes to persuade us that "linear discrete images," such as a picket fence, the identical windows in a street-car, and rows of identical houses "stand for modernism, rationalism, applied science, capitalism, progressivism, emasculation, the atomized consciousness and its pathological extensions" (KR,X, Autumn 1948, 540). Meanwhile, too little attention has been given to the extraordinary structural problems which Faulkner solved in *Light in August*.

What, essentially, is the story of the novel? How does Faulkner tell it? And why did he tell it the way he did? If we look at the beginning and ending, usually positions of great emphasis, we might say that this is the story of Lena and Byron. They meet, Byron at first sight falls in love with Lena, he helps her, she refuses him, he arranges for her seducer Brown (or Burch) to see her again, and he vainly fights the escaping Brown. In the last chapter, which has the quality of an epilogue, Byron is doggedly faithful to Lena, and her eventual acceptance of him is implied. In essence, this is a simple small-town idyll, with a touch of comic irony. Lena never deceives Byron, for when they meet it is obvious that Lena is pregnant and deserted by her lover. Yet for Byron there is no meanness or cheapness in her. His help to her is a gift. He never shows any resentment at her reluctance to allow him to take the place of the vanished and worthless Brown. The comic tone of the last chapter is the contribution of the furniture dealer, the rank outsider ignorant of previous episodes, merely trying to make a good story for the amusement of his wife. It is important that the Lena-Byron story is told in chronological sequence, just as it developed. This is the simple narrative thread that gives a recurrent sense of forward motion.

The word *recurrent* is deliberate, for during most of the novel (Chs. 3-19) we are chiefly occupied with the Joe Christmas story, which is told in violently nonchronological order. Clustered about the Joe Christmas story are the four stories or sub-stories of (1) Joe's partner Brown (or Burch), of (2) Joanna Burden, the benefactress and mistress murdered by Joe Christmas, of (3) the Hineses, grandparents of Joe, and of (4) Hightower, the unemployed, discredited preacher. Three levels of time are used. There is the present, which begins with the report of Joanna Burden's murder (Ch. 4). This present action is continued by the sheriff's investigation of the crime, Christmas's arrest, escape and death (Chs. 13-19). By time and coincidence the major action concerning Christmas is related to the Lena-Byron action, through Byron's friend Hightower. The second time level is the immediate past in which Christmas committed the crime: part of Ch. 2 explains Brown's (or Burch's) association with Christmas; Ch. 5 tells the quarrel between Brown and Christmas on the night of the murder; Chs. 10, 11, and 12 tell the story of Christmas's relationship with Joanna over a period of three years, including the murder and Christmas's flight. The third level of time is the remote past, which gives distance and

perspective to our knowledge of three characters. The early life of Hightower, the unfrocked preacher, is given in Chs. 3 and 20, the boyhood of Christmas in Chs. 6-9; and the story of Joanna Burden's abolitionist family is interjected into Christmas's early acquaintance with her in Ch. 11. Through the Hineses the circumstances of Christmas's birth are brought out in Chs. 15-16.

Deprived of the vitalizing force of description and dialogue, such a structural synopsis seems more confusing than the novel itself, but the elements of the structure are at least underlined: the contrast of major and minor action; the intertwining of present, immediate past, and remote past. How are these elements combined and made to function? What advantages accrue from this structure to set over against the loss in clarity involved in departure from a straight chronological sequence?

An important consideration is the relation between the enveloping — though minor — Lena-Byron story and the central Joe Christmas story. It is a chronological accident that they come together at all, for Lena arrives in Jefferson on the very day that the murder is discovered. There is a startling contrast between the simplicity of the one action and the devious complexity of the other that is appropriate to the characters involved. Each story helps to make the other more acceptable. Since Faulkner shows that he can tell a story simply, it is reasonable to suppose that the complexity of the Joe Christmas story is deliberate and accountable. And since the author demonstrates a strong liking for complexity, it is natural to accept his simple episodes as genuinely simple, not artificially simplified. There is, too, the obvious contrast of love and hate. Joe Christmas is a loveless person. In youth he distrusts the kindness of Mrs. McEachern as he later does that of Joanna. He is not at home with whites or Negroes, with men or women. Lena and Byron, on the contrary, are lovers. They supply the circle of humanity which Christmas stands outside of. Both stories are, if you like, implausible, but their implausibility is minimized by their contrast.

The first link between the two actions is an incidental mention in Ch. 1 of the fire at the Burden place. The next link is in Ch. 4, when Brown's confused story is retold to Hightower by Byron, and from this we learn what the town first finds out about the murder. This leads backward in Ch. 5 to the day and evening Christmas spent preceding the murder, with his concluding thought: "Something is going to happen. Something is going to happen to me." Now at this point we already know what is going to happen. We know that Joe is going to murder Joanna Burden. But we do not know why he will, and this is a spring of interest powerful enough to carry us through five chapters of Joe's early life and one of Joanna's before we come back to the night of the murder in Ch. 12. Ch. 13 then begins on the morning after the murder and the fire. With our own superior knowledge we watch the sheriff struggling to piece together the bits of evidence. The spring of interest now is in wondering how long it will take the Sheriff to catch up to the understanding of the crime which we as readers already possess. The flight and capture of Joe Christmas is next suggested

in a series of scenes. Then in Ch. 15 the Hineses are catapulted into the action. The spring of interest now becomes surprise rather than suspense. We the readers, who felt we knew the whole story of Christmas now learn that his grandfather took him to the orphanage because of his supposed Negro blood, a "fact" Christmas later came to suspect. But the Hineses do not merely support the idea that Christmas has Negro blood. Their own conflict creates a new suspense about Christmas, now prisoner in the county jail. Hines tries to incite the lynching of his own grandson, and his wife tries to prevent him. Next there is the desperate proposal that Hightower give a false alibi for Christmas, Hightower's refusal, Christmas's unexpected and hopeless break away from the Sheriff, and his violent death in Hightower's kitchen.

The slow shift from minor to major action, the strategic use of the reader's responses, and the solid delineation of Joe Christmas are triumphs of narrative structure. Yet two important characters seem insufficiently developed: Joanna Burden and Hightower. The full focus of attention is turned on Joanna in only two chapters (11 and 12); elsewhere she is incidental. In these chapters Faulkner tells first of the seduction of Joanna, then the tangled earlier history of the spinster, the last of a New England abolitionist line, perversely settled in the South. After Colonel Sartoris killed her half-brother and grandfather, Joanna lived in isolation, using her income to support Negro schools. At forty-one, after Joe possesses her, she turns into a nymphomaniac, determined to possess him completely by adding religious sanction to their relationship. The climax of Ch. 12 is Joanna's melodramatic attempt to compel Joe to pray with her at the point of a gun. It is this gesture which precipitates the murder, though the murder itself is implied rather than described at this point. Joanna's behavior seems to me convenient to Faulkner's purpose of accounting for Joe Christmas's action, but not sufficiently developed to be acceptable in itself as a convincing portrayal of Joanna.

The objection to Hightower is of a different kind. Like Joanna, it is true, Hightower is a character isolated by a peculiar family history, and in fiction as in life, an isolated character is harder to judge than one in close and familiar association with other people. The episodes of his life fit into no ordinary pattern. If the fictional character is vivid we tend to accept him as at least an interesting possibility. Years before our story opens, the scandal regarding Hightower's wife had lost him his church and had ostracized him from the community, yet he refused to leave it. Living on without purpose, he is nevertheless represented as developing an attitude of intense compassion. "Poor man. Poor mankind," he says when he first hears the story of the murder. His assistance at the birth of the Negro baby, and later at the birth of Lena's child, illustrates this idea. He listens with compassion to the strange story of the Hineses, even though he vigorously refuses to give the false alibi for Christmas. (Ironically, when Percy Grimm has cornered Christmas, Hightower vainly shouts the alibi he had earlier refused to give.) Like Joanna, the unfrocked preacher is convenient to Faulkner's action, but unlike her, Hightower sometimes seems the



mouthpiece of the author. Before the Hineses come in, Hightower is represented as thinking:

Listening [to Protestant music], he seems to hear within it the apotheosis of his own history, his own land, his own environed blood: that people from which he sprang and among whom he lives who can never take either pleasure or catastrophe or escape from either, without brawling over it. Pleasure, ecstasy, they cannot seem to bear: their escape from it is in violence, in drinking and fighting and praying; catastrophe too, the violence identical and apparently inescapable. *And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another?* he thinks. (p. 322)

In this and many other passages, the design of the author seems too palpable, to use Keats's adjective. Finally, in Ch. 20, there seems to be an attempt to magnify the importance of Hightower beyond his significance in the action. Before discussing this chapter further, however, I wish to set it in its context.

The peculiar structure adopted by Faulkner permits the maximum of variety in tone and texture in the last three chapters of the novel. At the very end of Ch. 18 the news of Joe Christmas's death comes to Byron Bunch in the flattest and least circumstantial tone of country gossip. "What excitement in town this evening?" says Byron, and the countryman, still disappointed that he himself had missed the excitement, replies: "I thought maybe you hadn't heard. About an hour ago. That nigger, Christmas. They killed him" (p. 387). Ch. 19, which follows immediately, is a typical Faulknerian time complication. Instead of taking us at once to the murder, Faulkner begins with various opinions on why Christmas had taken refuge in Hightower's house. This leads into the scene at the railroad station, where Lawyer Stevens is putting Christmas's grandparents on the train for Mottstown and promising to send the grandson's body to them for burial. As it happens, a friend of Stevens, a college professor, alights from this very train, and it is to the professor that Stevens gives four pages of his own theory that Mrs. Hines saw an irrational hope in the preacher and confided it to Christmas when she visited him in the jail, just before his escape. Stevens theorizes shrewdly:

And he believed her. I think that is what gave him not courage so much as the passive patience to endure and recognize and accept the one opportunity which he had to break in the middle of that crowded square, manacled, and run. But there was too much running with him, stride for stride with him. Not pursuers: but himself: years, acts, deeds omitted and committed, keeping pace with him, stride for stride, breath for breath, thud for thud of the heart, using a single heart. It was not alone all those thirty years which she [Mrs. Hines] did not know, but all those successions of thirty years before that which

had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will, and which killed him. But he must have run with believing for a while; anyway, with hope. But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. (pp. 392-393)

This passage illustrates Faulkner's remarkable capacity to reveal the complexity just beneath the seeming simplicity of the surface. It is the revelation of complexity that generates a strange yet believable intensity. Concreteness and abstraction are cunningly blended. There is the picture of the manacled man making the sudden break in the crowded square, there is the sense of his running in "stride," "breath," and "thud of the heart." But running with him are "years, acts, deeds committed or omitted," abstractions not bare for us, but richly prepared for in the previous accounts of the orphanage, the McEacherns, Barbara Allen, and Joanna Burden. The structure of the narrative has placed us inside these abstractions. We understand the difference between belief in freedom and mere hope of it.

At the end of Stevens's account there is a break in the chapter and a shift in tone to a straightforward account of Percy Grimm, born too late for World War I, but now the young captain of the National Guard company. Percy seems the personification of civic responsibility, of law and order, forcing the sheriff to permit Legionnaires to act as special guards over the weekend. On Monday afternoon Percy instantly interprets the deputy's shots as announcing Christmas's escape. Then follow four pages of as sharply told pursuit as I know. Minutes later—seconds, perhaps—Percy follows Christmas into Hightower's house. Hightower's protest and false alibi enrage him, and the disciplined intelligence by which Percy pursued gives way to blood lust. Shooting through the overturned kitchen table behind which Christmas cowers, Percy mortally wounds him. Then seizing a butcher knife, he castrates the living man. For many writers this crude act of violence would be the ultimate effect, but not for Faulkner. In the sentences which picture the dying Christmas an inner tension is created which surpasses the physical violence.

He just lay there, with his eyes open and empty of everything save consciousness, and with something, a shadow, about his mouth. For a long moment he looked up at them with peaceful and unfathomable and unbearable eyes. Then his face, body, all, seemed to collapse, to fall in upon itself, and from out the slashed garments about his hips and loins the pent black blood seemed to rush like a released breath. It seemed to rush out of his pale body like the rush of sparks from a rising rocket; upon that black blast the man seemed to rise soaring into their memories forever and ever. They are not to lose it, in whatever peaceful valleys, beside whatever placid and reassuring streams of old age, in the mirroring faces of whatever children they will contemplate old disasters and newer hopes. It will be there, musing, quiet, steadfast, not fading and not particularly threatening, but of itself alone serene, of itself alone triumphant. Again from the town, deaden-

ed a little by the walls, the scream of the siren mounted toward its unbelievable crescendo, passing out of the realm of hearing. (p. 407)

The seemingly disjointed organization of this chapter has justified itself. Every necessary explanation has been made earlier. When the shattering climax comes, the print on the page renders the concentrated experience.

Ch. 20, with its long account of Hightower's early life, is structurally much less effective. Miss Hirshleifer, whose analysis of this novel (*Perspective*, II, Summer 1949) has been much praised, says that it "is not anticlimactic after Christmas's death, but the vital philosophical counterpart of it" (p. 233). I agree that this was probably Faulkner's intention, but I think the chapter fails for most readers to overcome this sense of anticlimax. First, as to the intention. Hightower though discredited and isolated, is the conscience that broods over the action of the novel. He is also the link between the Lena-Byron and the Joe Christmas action. Through his suffering, Hightower has learned compassion: "Poor man. Poor mankind," he says, and when Christmas takes refuge in his house, Hightower instinctively shouts the false alibi he had earlier refused to give. As this action illustrates, Hightower's compassion came too late in life to be effective. Even as a boy, he idealized not the earnest peace-loving father, but the swashbuckling grandfather. Hightower's religion was thus corrupted from the beginning by his dreams of a past military glory, so corrupted that even his marriage was poisoned—though Hightower's wife was certainly frustrated and neurotic before her marriage. It is the corruptness of Hightower's religion, the pitiful lateness of his mature compassion, that represents the sickness in the spiritual life of Jefferson. Needing a religion of wisdom and compassion, the community gets all too often, even from a "good" minister like Hightower, a religion of dynamic hatred, intolerance, and frustration. And thus the brutalities of the Joe Christmas story can occur.

The foregoing statement is doubtless too simple. But I think that it gives the general direction of Ch. 20, and justifies Miss Hirshleifer's insistence that it is not anticlimactic. Yet in my first reading of the novel I missed this meaning, or at any rate found it obscured by a great deal of elaboration that did not seem pertinent. The reason, I think, is that in trying to avoid the obvious ways of registering this idea, Faulkner has overreached the reader (this one, anyway) as, in a sense, Shakespeare never overreaches the reader or spectator. With the tremendous climax of Ch. 19, the reader is almost literally in a state of shock. As he turns the page to begin the next chapter, I think he expects to find out what happened next—at least what happens to Hightower, for he already knows that Lawyer Stevens put the Hineses on the train for Mottstown that very evening, promising to send the body of Joe Christmas to them for burial. Ch. 20 begins:

Now the final copper light of afternoon fades; now the street beyond the low maples and the low signboard is prepared and empty, framed by the study window like a stage.

He can remember how when he was young, after he first came to Jefferson from the seminary, how that fading copper light would seem almost audible, like a dying yellow fall of trumpets dying into an interval of silence and waiting, out of which they would presently come. Already, even before the falling horns had ceased, it would seem to him that he could hear the beginning thunder not yet louder than a whisper, a rumor, in the air. (p. 408)

This leads into Hightower's memories of his childhood, his father, his grandfather, his mother, and the old Negro slave. Now I can very well believe that being involved in an event like the killing of Joe Christmas would cause a man, particularly an isolated and introspective man like Hightower, to remember his early life, to reconstruct and search for a meaning in the whole pattern of his being. But for me the transition is too abrupt, the long chapter digresses too much from natural reminders of the immediate past. There are one or two references to Hightower's bandaged head. That is all. There is no answer even to the obvious question: When Byron returned to town for Lena, did he go to see Hightower? It seems to me that Faulkner's narrative judgment is less sound in Ch. 20 than in Ch. 19. Nevertheless, this may be a defect in the reader rather than in Faulkner. Once the intention of the Hightower chapter becomes clear, or when the chapter is read as an episode partially detached from its structural context (that is, as an account of Hightower's youth) it is memorable. The little boy fingering the coat his father wore in the army is a fine detail, and so is the remark of the old slave: "No suh . . . Not Marse Gail. Not him. Dey wouldn't *dare* to kill a Hightower." And I would not want to sacrifice the wonderful vision of the wheel merging the faces that represent Hightower's experience in a swirling confusion that announces his death as he looks out the window. Whether Ch. 20 is satisfactory or not in the general strategy of the novel, it offers a remarkable contrast in tone and texture to the violence of Ch. 19.

The final chapter strikes still another note, the unexpected one of comedy. In the Lena-Byron action, which must now be concluded in harmony with the opening of the novel, and with the characters of Lena and Byron, all the elements of a conventional ending are present. Now that Brown has run out on her a second time, there is really nothing for Lena to do but reward the patient and devoted Byron. Granted her easy acceptance of what life brings her—a lover, a baby, a ride in a wagon—we may doubt whether she would ever have shown any reluctance or delay in taking such an obviously good mate as Byron. But regardless of when she accepts him, the prospect is that the last chapter will be a conventional footnote, with an intimation of happy wedded bliss. Faulkner is not the man to be trapped into any such tame conclusion. Instead of winding up the Lena-Byron story himself, that is in his own voice, he invents a traveling furniture dealer, a rank outsider who knows nothing of the previous history of this strange pair—or trio, if you count the baby. The furniture dealer, telling the story to his wife, doesn't really have to explain the story he tells, because he can't be expected to understand it. He simply tells what he saw and what he heard, with a few

shrewd guesses. Within these limits he is so good a story-teller that he entertains the reader as well as his wife. Lena's persistence in the search for the worthless Brown, and her reluctance to take Byron may in fact be implausible. Seen through the furniture dealer's eyes, they seem merely comical illustrations of the unfathomable perversity of women. The furniture dealer sets down Lena's reluctance to her childlike interest in travel, and Lena's final comment bears him out: "My, my. A body does get around. Here we aint been coming from Alabama but two months, and now it's already Tennessee."

In this paper I have not tried to show that the narrative structure of *Light in August* is perfect. Joanna Burden remains convenient rather than convincing, Hightower is too obtrusive, and the fusion of major and minor actions may be called ingenious rather than inspired. Yet when the difficulties of the structural problems are fairly confronted, the achievement overshadows such defects. In 1939 George M. O'Donnell called the novel "confused" and "malproportioned." Richard Rovere (1950) and Irving Howe (1951) both found it loose in structure. These judgments do not take into account the difficulty of the problems Faulkner faced, and the resourcefulness of his solutions. If the structure of the novel is firmly grasped, we may find that the story itself is more interesting than paraphrases of its supposed symbolic meaning.

#### THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF FAULKNER'S *Light in August*

Day	Ch.	FORWARD ACTION
		IMMEDIATE PAST
		REMOTE PAST
Sat.	1	Lena's arrival in Jefferson. Burden fire sighted.
Sat.	2	Brown's association with Joe Christmas explained. Byron identifies Brown as Burch (Lena's seducer).
	3	Hightower's life in Jefferson. His wife's scandalous death. Loss of his church. His delivery of the Negro baby.
Sun.	4	Byron tells Hightower of Lena's search for Brown (Burch), of the fire, of the murder of Joanna Burden.
Fri.	5	Christmas quarrels with Brown, goes to town, returns: "Something is going to happen to me."
	6-7-8-9	Christmas at Orphanage, adopted by McEacherns, meets waitress and tells her he is part Negro, beats up McEachern at dance, is himself beaten by waitress's friends.
	10	Christmas, three years before the murder, enters Joanna Burden's kitchen.
	11	Christmas seduces Joanna Burden. Story of the Burden family, abolitionists settled in the South.
	12	Christmas resents Joanna's increasing domination.
Fri.		Christmas murders Joanna when she draws a pistol.
Fri.		Christmas commandeers a car to further his escape.



- Sat. 13 Sheriff investigates murder.  
 Tues. Byron tells Hightower he is moving Lena to Brown's cabin at Burden place.  
 Wed. Hightower learns that Christmas's trail has been found.  
 Wed. Hightower urges Byron to leave Lena.  
 Wed. 14 Deputy reports Lena staying at Brown's cabin.  
 Tues. Christmas disturbs Negro church.  
 Fri. after murder Christmas captured at Mottstown.  
 Fri. 15 Hineses learn of Christmas's capture.  
 Sun. 16 Through Byron, Mrs. Hines asks Hightower to give false alibi for her grandson, Christmas. Hightower refuses. Byron takes Hineses to Lena's cabin.  
 Mon. 17 Lena's baby born. Byron, previously refused by Lena, quits his job.  
 Mon. 18 Brown, taken by deputy to see Lena, escapes.  
 Mon. Brown, pursued by Byron, beats him up.  
 Mon. Byron learns Christmas has been killed.  
 Mon. 19 Lawyer Stevens puts Hineses on train, promising to send Christmas's body for burial.  
 Mon. Christmas escapes, is shot and castrated by Percy Grimm.  
 20 Hightower's early life—his Civil War father and grandfather, his invalid mother, his marriage to the minister's daughter.  
 Mon. Hightower's death.  
 21 The traveling furniture dealer's story of Byron's dog-like faithfulness to Lena, and her eventual acceptance of him.

*Light in August: THE TWO ACTIONS CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED*

The story of Lena and Byron is told in the following chapters: 1-2, meeting in Jefferson. 4, Byron's account of Lena, given to Hightower. 13, Byron moves Lena to Brown's cabin at the Burden place. 14, Deputy reports Lena living in Brown's cabin. 17, Lena's baby born. 18, Brown, confronting Lena, abandons her and later beats up Byron. 21, Byron accompanies Lena, and is eventually accepted by her.

The story of Joe Christmas is told in the following chapters: 15, birth of Joe Christmas (told by the Hineses, his grandparents). 6-7-8-9-10, Joe's early life (orphanage, adoption by the McEacherns, affair with the waitress, fifteen years of wandering, meeting with Joanna Burden). 5, Events leading up to Joe's murder of Joanna. 12, scene immediately before the murder. 1, first mention of the fire which broke out after the murder. 13, Sheriff's investigation of the murder. 4, Brown's story (as told to Hightower by Byron). 13-14, Christmas's trail to Mottstown. 15, Hines tries to incite Mrs. Hines to prevent the lynch-

ing of Christmas. 16, Hightower refuses to give false alibi for Christmas. 19, Christmas killed when he escapes and takes refuge in Hightower's house. (According to Stevens, this was at the suggestion of Mrs. Hines.) Hightower does give the false alibi, but in vain.

The principal episodes from the remote past are as follows: 3, 17, 20, Hightower's early life. 11, Joanna Burden's family history and early life. 6-7-8-9-10, Joe Christmas's early life (listed above).

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## Summary Of A Symposium On "Light In August"

WHEN A GROUP of Russians visited this country recently and the plans for their tour were under discussion, I saw a letter to the editor in some newspaper or other which strongly urged that the Russian visitors should not be taken to Mississippi on the ground that it would give them an unfavorable opinion of the United States and perhaps supply confirmation of the propaganda which some agencies of their government put forth. I do not suppose it occurred to the writer that the Russians already had a vivid picture of Mississippi land and people derived in part, at least, from an American, not a Russian source. They would know, as all the world knows, the novels of William Faulkner. Whether a visit to the scene would change or confirm this view is a different question, to which partial answers may have been suggested by some of the papers in this symposium. My point is that whatever we may think of it, Faulkner's world is now a part of the consciousness of mankind and we cannot ignore it.

Faulkner is important, let us remember, in various ways, and if we distinguish some of these ways we may avoid a certain amount of confusion. He is important, first, as a writer, and it is accordingly fitting that the first approach in this symposium, that represented by Professor McElderry, is a literary approach. Faulkner is important, also, as an expression of America, and here the disciplines of history and sociology, represented by Professor Applewhite and Professor Greer, have valuable guidance to give us. But anyone who heard or read Faulkner's Nobel Prize address must feel that he is at times more than a writer, more than an expression of America—he is in some ways a symbol. What is the meaning of the symbol and what is the source of its power may be questions which no one discipline can answer, but psychology, represented here by Professor Bernberg, may have a contribution to make.

I do not intend to convey the impression that anyone connected with this symposium thinks that we have exhausted the possibilities. Far from it. I can think of a very fruitful study of Faulkner as a Christian writer—a study not only of his representation of worship, frenzy and other religious attitudes, but of his symbolic characters. Or, on quite a different level, a study of kinds and uses of sensationalism—perhaps an



essay called "Faulkner's Novels as Gothic Romance." And since, to my eye at least, there is as much *dichtung* as *wahrheit* in this author's stories, I would read with interest an essay on Faulkner called "The Integrity of the Imagination, or, What Does He Think He Is Getting Away With?"

As it is, we have before us an unusually wide variety of approaches to *Light in August*, and we should be grateful. The scholar from another discipline rightly hesitates to use a literary document as his material, and I must express appreciation to a historian, a sociologist, and a psychologist who are brave enough to risk the raised eyebrows of their professional colleagues in order to collaborate in this study.

Professor McElderry rightly sees his author as a tale-teller, and *Light in August* as first of all a story. The problem for the reader, then, and the critic, is to understand the design. Why is the story told *in this way*? The Lena-Byron narrative is chronologically told; the tale of Joe Christmas is violently non-chronological. Moreover it is a chronological accident that the two main stories come together at all. Professor McElderry finds that the purpose here is contrast—the contrast of simplicity and complexity, of love and hate. And he points out, very shrewdly, that the implausibility of the two stories is minimized by the effect of these contrasts. Professor McElderry's comments on the end of the book are also perceptive—the gathering of meaning in the last three chapters and the effective muting of tone in the very end.

Our historian brings not only his professional discipline but experience of living in the South, a decade in Mississippi, to his study of *Light in August*. In Professor Applewhite's opinion the four major characteristics of the area are its homogeneous population, its derivative puritanism, its clan and family feeling, and its endless talk. As a historian he is interested in tradition and the survival of forms and values—Calvinism really survives in the South. But as an observer of Mississippi he finds Faulkner a faithful recorder of only *part* of the scene—his own county, perhaps. He praises the novelist's description of the scenery and his fine portrayal of the Negroes and small farmers. What one misses in *Light in August* is any adequate picture of the middle class.

Professor Greer replies that there is no necessity for Faulkner to represent all classes of society; a novelist is not a social scientist and his novels are not case studies. Instead, the novelist makes or synthesizes his own world for the interpretation or conveyance of meaning. Professor Greer does not, he says, approach *Light in August* as a sociologist; it is apparent that he approaches the book as a sensitive reader, and we welcome his perceptions more readily because they are not expressed in the jargon sociologists sometimes use.

The three principal characters, Christmas, Miss Burden and Hightower, are all involved with Negroism, although there are no important Negroes in the book. But in Professor Greer's view, *Light in August* is not a problem novel. Joe Christmas is the kind of "marginal man" who appears wherever culture groups come into contact and intermingle. Moreover, because of the uncertainty about his race, Joe is a test of human social reality. There is some meaning in the analogy

between Joe Christmas and Christ. A messiah appears in situations in which a culture is being crushed; Joe is no messiah but he has the burden of knowledge and cannot express it. Professor Greer warns us that Faulkner is not an intellectual, and neither are his characters: meaning must be inferred. And on the religious side, we are stimulated by the observation that Faulkner vividly represents a "faith in sin," a pre-Christian and profound heritage.

From our psychologist, Professor Bernberg, we again get a disclaimer: a novel does not give all the pertinent data on individuals which the psychologist would need for professional study. Accordingly, he, too, must accept the role of mere reader. And Professor Bernberg concerns himself with the problem of the reader's involvement in *Light in August*. Does the method of Faulkner's novel unnecessarily limit its audience? Is the reader allowed to be confident as to whether he is reading a document with a social message or just an exciting mystery story? Some of the popular objections to Faulkner in general and to this novel in particular derive from the fact that the reader is given so little chance to project himself into the scene and to identify himself with a character. According to one psychological theory, interest is maintained primarily by projection and identification.

This summary of the observations of four experts on a single literary work is offered merely as a kind of platform or observation tower from which we may all enjoy the view. Some of us will fix our gaze on certain details of the landscape, some on others. But we have been made aware, I think, that there is much to be seen, and we have had certain timely warnings of what *not* to look for. It seems to me that this symposium well illustrates the contributions to literary study that can be made by other disciplines, and it illustrates also the vitality of William Faulkner's *Light in August*.

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## The Several Faces Of Gavin Stevens

GAVIN STEVENS, one of William Faulkner's more ubiquitous characters, has appeared as a central figure in three of the Yoknapatawpha novels, *Intruder in the Dust*, *Requiem for a Nun*, and *The Town*, in the volume of short stories *Knight's Gambit*, in other short stories, and in miscellaneous pieces. This bachelor—dignified, calm, unexcitable, detached, sophisticated, well educated at Harvard and the University of Heidelberg, and county attorney for some years (having succeeded his father in the post)—is also one of Faulkner's most enigmatic characters; at times, he seems to speak for the old traditions of Mississippi and Yoknapatawpha, at times like a prophet for the new era in the South, and at other times like a transitional figure between the two worlds which Faulkner is always presenting in his works. As a teacher of his nephew Charles (Chick) Mallison throughout the novels—the two always appear together, he seems to be trying to instruct Chick in the old ways while preparing him for the new and to serve as a link between the Sartorises, the Compsons, the De Spains, and other founding fathers of Yoknapatawpha and the Snopeses, who seem fated to inherit the earth, not through meekness but through rapacity. What motivates Gavin Stevens seems to change from book to book, and he seems rather inconsistent in his actions; however, it will be the purpose of this discussion to point out that these apparent shifts are not necessarily real changes. There seems to be a dominant theme which will explain his actions.

The *Knight's Gambit* stories show Gavin Stevens as a clever intellectual, an almost super-rational person who can solve crimes and reveal the names of guilty ones in the manner of the best detective stories. His information is disclosed in long questioning and speculative sessions with the defendant without any of the difficult leg work which goes along with routine police activity. In "Smoke," for example, we have an almost perfect picture of the use of pure reason, for Gavin Stevens arrives at the solution through his knowledge of the backgrounds of the characters and a completely unethical trick to break down the guilty one. In this story, Faulkner gives us a good description of the man:

Stevens talked quietly, not looking at anyone in particular. He had been county attorney for almost as long as Judge Dunkin-

field had been chancellor. He was a Harvard graduate: a loose-jointed man with a mop of untidy iron-gray hair, who could discuss Einstein with college professors and who spent whole afternoons among the squatting men against the wall of country stores, talking to them in their idiom. He called these his vacations. (p. 17)

Heidelberg came after Harvard, a matter which is the basis of one of the few Faulknerian inconsistencies and which I shall refer to later.

The other stories in this volume, with the exception of the long title story, show Gavin in the same role, the almost supernaturally inspired prober into the weak points of various characters. Chick acts as a receiver of his confidences and errand runner while Gavin sits in the ivory tower of his study, thinking, thinking, thinking and talking, talking, talking. At times, he seems immune to calls to action, but Faulkner shows that, in his case anyhow, action is unnecessary as long as his superlatively apperceptive intellect is as keen as it is.

*Intruder in the Dust* seems to present Gavin in a similar role—the clever lawyer, but Faulkner goes one step further and depicts Gavin as almost physically incapable of action. He stirs from his office to consult with Lucas Beauchamp in jail and to inspect the cemetery, but he seems resigned to the Gowrie lynch mob, giving Lucas no hope that the will of the mob can be thwarted by the forces of law and order. When Chick with Aleck Sander and Mrs. Habersham intervenes to prove that Lucas is innocent of murdering a white man, Gavin warns him that he is fighting against the insuperable force of the Southern tradition that no Southern white man will allow a Negro even accused of killing a white man to escape the noose and the fire. Even though Gavin makes some rather half-hearted statements about leaving Lucas' fate in the hands of a judge and jury, he is never so insistent on this point that he will make any real effort to bring it to pass. He seems weak and ineffectual throughout the book, and in the final scene with Lucas and Chick, he says that Yoknapatawpha will accuse Chick of heresy and treason to his Southern upbringing because he persisted in proving Lucas innocent.

However, *Intruder* presents Gavin in another role: that of a defender of the Southern traditions against Yankee rush to elevate Negro status to that of the whites:

Only a few of us know that only from homogeneity comes anything of a people or for a people of durable and lasting value—the literature, the art, the science, that minimum of government and police which is the meaning of freedom and liberty, and perhaps most valuable of all a national character worth anything in a crisis . . . That's why we must resist the North: not just to preserve ourselves nor even the two of us as one to remain one nation because that will be the inescapable by-product of what we will preserve: . . . the postulate that Sambo is a human being living in a free country and hence must be free. That's what we are really defending: the privilege of setting

him free ourselves: which we will have to do for the reason that nobody else can since going on a century now the North tried it and have been admitting for seventy-five years now that they failed. . . . Someday Lucas Beauchamp can shoot a white man in the back with the same impunity to lynch-rope or gasoline as a white man; in time he will vote anywhen and anywhere a white man can and send his children to the same school anywhere the white man's children go and travel anywhere the white man travels as the white man does it. But it wont be next Tuesday. Yet people in the North believe it can be compelled even into next Monday by the simple ratification by votes of a printed paragraph . . . . (pp. 154-155)

(This statement seems remarkably like Faulkner's letter to *Life*, published several years ago, in which he urges the North to go slow in enforcing racial integration on the South for fear that a new War Between the States will break out.) Thus, it would seem that Faulkner made Gavin his personal mouthpiece, at least on this matter; like Faulkner, at this time, Gavin, it is apparent, would prefer the *status quo* or at least would object to supporting private views with public action, if that public action demanded more than a few letters to the editor or speeches. Faulkner, however, has since gone much further toward the Northern point of view since the publication of this book. See the series of letters in the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* in March and April, 1955.

*Requiem for a Nun* presents still a third Gavin Stevens face—that of a political big wheel in Jefferson and Yoknapatawpha who has power and prestige enough to plead for clemency for Nancy Mingo direct to the governor's office. As Temple Drake's father confessor and comforter, he advises her properly and well; as a friend, he takes abuse from the jailor for defending the convicted "nigger murderess" of his own niece. Thus, Faulkner shows that Gavin was capable of overt action at one period of his life, although Faulkner (in the other books) demonstrates that such moments of action are few and far between; but this action is still that of an intellectual who uses his mind and cleverness with the law, rather than his physical powers, in conflict.

The latest Faulkner opus, *The Town*, presents a fourth and different Gavin Stevens role. In this book, he has become almost pure mind, his action limited to little more than that required to listen to Chick and V. K. Ratliff and to talk to them in return as in alternating chapters each tells a portion of the story of the invasion of Jefferson by the Snopeses. Stevens and Ratliff consider themselves Snopes fighters, almost like members of a guerilla band who take upon themselves primary responsibility of keeping the Snopeses in their place. That the inroads of the Snopeses are successful should occasion no surprise, because Gavin Stevens seems so paralyzed that he cannot take positive and definite action against them. Flem Snopes, the leader of the pack, might have been stopped in his progress from tent to restaurant to vice-president and finally to president of the Sartoris bank, if Gavin had acted vigorously and courageously at the first sign of Snopes infestation. He was content to think, think, think and talk, talk, talk and allow



Flem to win the battle by default. As smart as Faulkner makes the man, he could have discovered some pretext legal or illegal, that could have stopped them, especially since he is county attorney. Like a number of Southern aristocrats, Stevens is content to let others soil their hands with dirty work while he sits in the ivory tower of his office and tries to predict Flem's next move. Even when he is successful in figuring what will happen next, which is not often, he *does* nothing.

Faulkner, in a sense, motivates his paralysis by having Gavin fall in love with Eula Varner, Flem's wife, who is also the mistress of Manfred de Spain, successor to old Colonel Sartoris as president of the bank. Their affair is public knowledge for eighteen years and is finally used by Flem to maneuver Manfred out of the bank and put himself in control. Flem also uses Eula's daughter—not his because he is sexually impotent—as a tool in his rise, and there is some evidence that Gavin is either in love with her or pretending to be so that he can rescue her from Snopesism. It is significant at this point to note that Gavin also has no children, has never married; like Flem, he is to all intents and purposes impotent, but by choice, for he had relinquished Eula to Manfred and fled to Heidelberg to "forget." At the end of the book, Flem's purchase of the old de Spain mansion in Jefferson after the suicide of Eula indicates that Jefferson has capitulated. Faulkner promises us another novel in the Snopes trilogy—*The Mansion*, which will probably show Flem achieving "respectability," which he does not have in *The Town* and which he wants very much.

On the point of the Eula-Gavin love affair (which seems rather half-hearted on Gavin's side), there is one of Faulkner's few inconsistencies in the continuing Yoknapatawpha saga. In the long short-story, "Knight's Gambit," Gavin is supposed to be in love with another girl, whose maiden name Faulkner never gives. According to this story, Gavin, while at Heidelberg, wrote two letters—one to his mistress in Paris and the other to his fiancée in Jefferson; by accident, the letters were placed in the wrong envelopes, and the girl, shocked by Gavin's love letter to another woman, justifiably breaks the engagement. Soon afterwards, she is married to a New Orleans man, Mr. Harriss, whom the county imagined to be a wealthy bootlegger. According to *The Town*, Gavin went to Heidelberg to escape Eula Snopes but carried a large and brightly glowing torch for her for the rest of his life, remaining single because of his love for her. Faulkner usually keeps up with his characters better than this, for the first half of *The Town* is replete with references to Sartoris, *The Sound and the Fury*, *The Hamlet*, *Go Down, Moses*, *Intruder in the Dust*, as well as several short stories which are re-written as chapters in this novel; in each case, the retelling squares with the original; only in this one instance does a discrepancy develop. Since the beginning of the love affair in "Knight's Gambit" is at about the same date as the one in *The Town*, something is wrong with Faulkner's sequence of events or Faulkner made the change deliberately to properly motivate Gavin's actions. This motivation, however, is weak, and Gavin, the superior intellect, allows himself and Jefferson to be overrun, while he thinks, thinks, and talks, talks, talks. As an anti-aristocrat, Flem wins each battle with little or no positive opposition, perhaps because Gavin is too proud to descend to Flem's level to



scrap over a town, a civilization, a way of life. Intellectual and blue-blooded, Gavin has so little in common with the Snopes clan that he seems to be unwilling to drop his manners and fight in the only way a Snopes could understand—with his bare fists. The times seem to have passed him by.

What Faulkner seems to be dramatizing in *The Town* with obvious regret is the effeteness of Southern aristocrats, too busy with their Byron Societies and Cotillion Clubs, who have been rendered impotent by the poor whites and rednecks coming to town out of the hills and backwoods to become the future "first families" of many Southern communities. Through their own foolishness or incapacity at in-fighting, the upper class has been defeated and is being ignored by the upstarts like Flem Snopes who have none of the admirable qualities that the Southern aristocrats think they have a monopoly on.

The several novels reveal the several faces of Gavin Stevens as he gradually declines and surrenders his urge to action to V. K. Ratliff and Chick Mallison; the revelations continuing are not an inconsistent series of studies, each showing an entirely different aspect of a single character, for the whole Yoknapatawpha saga is of a piece. The moral, and Faulkner is nearly always the moralist in his works, seems to be one which man can learn from history or physics. Whenever weakness occurs, for whatever reason, and creates a vacuum because of the absence of power and strength, someone or something is going to rush in to fill the space, because nature abhors a vacuum. When the Compsons, the Sartorises, the Stevenses, the Sutpens, and the de Spains abdicated their influence in Jefferson, the Snopeses moved in, crawling in from the ant heap of Frenchman's Bend to engulf the whole town. Despite the fact that all those with the Snopes name are not inherently evil—Flem is pure evil as Gavin is pure intellect, Jefferson is taken over while the aristocrats sit in their studies, in their offices, or on their verandas and clack their tongues. Concerted action was needed; concerted action was action; Flem Snopes won, not by superior force but by fighting a battle with weapons which older Jeffersonians did not understand how to use. A new weapon—the crossbow, gunpowder, the tank, the A-bomb—always produces consternation in the ranks of the enemy; Flem introduced connivance and groin-gouging into an area unaccustomed to such means of fighting. The gradual blitzkrieg, and I am aware of the paradox expressed in that phrase, takes eighteen years, but Flem has time on his side, for there is confusion and lethargy among his foes.

Gavin Stevens, high minded egghead, is routed by a sharp stab of immorality—and reality.

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## Faulkner's Snopeses

WHEN HORACE BENBOW returned from World War I, the first thing Aunt Sall Wyatt asked him was, "Did you bring your Snopes back with you?" In order to make the reader aware of the significance of the question, Faulkner in *Sartoris* (1929) gives omnisciently a brief description of the Snopeses and of their impact upon Jefferson society.

This Snopes was a young man, member of a seemingly inexhaustible family which for the last ten years had been moving to town in dribbles from a small settlement known as Frenchman's Bend. Flem, the first Snopes, had appeared unheralded one day behind the counter of a small restaurant on a side street, patronized by country folk. With this foothold and like Abraham of old, he brought his blood and legal kin household by household, individual by individual, into town, and established them where they could gain money. Flem himself was presently manager of the city light and water plant, and for the following few years he was a sort of handy man to the municipal government, and three years ago, to old Bayard [Sartoris's] profane astonishment and unconcealed annoyance, he became vice-president of the Sartoris bank, where already a relation of his was a bookkeeper.

He still retained the restaurant, and the canvas tent in the rear of it, in which he and his wife and baby had passed the first few months of their residence in town; and it served as an alighting place for incoming Snopeses, from which they spread to small third-rate businesses of various kinds—grocery stores, barber shops (There was one, an invalid of some sort, who operated a second-hand peanut roaster)—where they multiplied and flourished . . . . (pp. 172-173)

Since 1929 Faulkner has been filling in this outline. More than a dozen of his short stories and five of his major novels, including the recently published *The Town*, have had Snopeses in important roles,

and *The Mansion*, which is to be published in the near future, is expected to bring the Snopeses' political and social rise up to the present.

The critics have not been unaware of the significance of Flem and his ubiquitous kin in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha Saga. In his "Faulkner's Mythology", George Marion O'Donnell established a pattern of interpretation that has been followed in many of the more recent commentaries. Faulkner, O'Donnell writes, is a traditional moralist and the central dramatic tension in his work is a "struggle between humanism and naturalism. . . . On one side of the conflict there are the Sartorises, recognizable human beings who act traditionally. . . ." Their antagonists are the Snopeses. "The Sartorises act traditionally; that is to say, they act always with an ethically responsible will. They represent vital morality, humanism. Being anti-traditional, the Snopeses are immoral . . . ; acting only for self-interest, they acknowledge no ethical duty . . . . They represent naturalism or animalism."<sup>1</sup>

Malcolm Cowley's well-known and invaluable introduction to the *Portable Faulkner* (1946) is obviously indebted to O'Donnell's interpretation. During Reconstruction and immediately afterwards, Cowley writes, "The men of the older order [Sartorises] found they had Southern enemies too: They had to fight against a new exploiting class descended from landless whites of slavery days. In this struggle between the clan of Sartoris and unscrupulous tribe of Snopes, the Sartorises were defeated in advance by a traditional code that kept them from using the weapons of the enemy" (p. 14).

Acknowledging his dependence upon O'Donnell, Professor Richmond C. Beatty states that Faulkner's theme is expressed "in terms of four families: the Sartorises, the Compsons, the Sutpens, and the Snopeses."

The Sartoris and Compson families—and even the Sutpens by extension—are aristocratic and traditional. All three clans were destroyed, both economically and spiritually, by the Civil War and its aftermath. Their inheritors, the Snopeses, take over because theirs are the ruthless and unscrupulous methods of our own age. No code of honor is comprehensible to them . . . .<sup>2</sup>

To many of the best known of Faulkner's commentators, it would seem, Snopishness epitomizes rapacious self-interest, animalism, and amorality. A close reading of Faulkner's novels and stories about the Snopeses, however, reveals that not all Snopeses fit the archetype. Ratliff, Faulkner's almost infallible point of view in *The Hamlet*, can understand and sympathize with Ab Snopes, the barn burner, but he has no compassion for Ab's son Flem, the avowed leader of the Snopes clan. There are obvious differences, too, between Colonel Sartoris Snopes and Flem. Although Flem is oblivious of any moral issue that might be in-

<sup>1</sup> Kenyon Review, I (Summer, 1939), 50.

<sup>2</sup> Beatty and others, *The Literature of the South* (Chicago, 1952), p. 627.

volved in Ab's retaliatory measures against society, Sarty is torn between his sense of right and justice and his desire for family loyalty. There is, too, Wall Street Panic Snopes, who reacts violently against Flem and everything Flem stands for. According to Gavin Stevens in *The Town* (1957), Wall is "doomed, damned, corrupted and self-convicted not merely of generosity but of taste" (p. 144). Wall refuses the money Flem tries to lend him to expand the store and indicates that he intends to make money by simple honesty and industry. Flem recognizes, of course, that these virtues often are more detrimental than helpful as one attempts to acquire wealth and social position.

It seems that one does an injustice to the thematic structure of the Saga when he insists, as O'Donnell does, that *all* the Snopeses are immoral, that they always act only for self-interest, and that they acknowledge no ethical duty. Faulkner's view of the world is much too realistic to allow him to present his conflict as a struggle between the all-good and the all-evil. Generally speaking, the Snopeses are materialistic, immoral, and debased, but there are gradations of morality, even among the Snopeses.

The opening scene in "Barn Burning"<sup>3</sup> is in a justice of the peace court where Ab Snopes is being tried on the charge of burning a barn which belonged to his landlord, a farmer named Harris. Ab's ten-year-old son Colonel Sartoris Snopes, from whose point of view the story is told, is waiting to testify. Although he knows that he will not be forced to commit perjury, he has already decided to give false testimony because "he's my father." As events develop, Sarty is not allowed to testify so the reader does not know whether he would have lied, but to Ab the boy's intentions are clear. After the judge has closed the case because of insufficient evidence and warned Ab to get his family "out of the country and not come back," Ab drives the wagon from the store in which the court had been held to a grove of oaks and beeches where the family will camp for the night. As soon as the crude preparations are finished, Ab calls the boy away from the fire and strikes him because he was going to tell the justice the truth. Ab hits him once, hard but without heat, and says, "You were fixing to tell them. You would have told him . . . You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you aint going to have any blood to stick to."

When the family arrives at their new home, the father tells Sarty to come with him. He is going, he says, to see the man who will own him "body and soul" for the next eight months. At the first glimpse of the big, imposing home where the De Spains live, the boy feels a surge of joy and peace because these people are free from his father; Ab cannot disturb "people whose lives are a part of this peace and dignity."

But Ab soils a rug and destroys it by using a lye solution much too harsh for the delicate fabric; consequently, he is fined ten bushels of corn. The night after the trial he takes Flem and goes to burn the de Spain barn. Although his mother tries to hold him, Sarty breaks away

<sup>3</sup> *Collected Stories* (New York, 1951).

and runs to warn the de Spains. He rushes in the house and yells, "Barn! Barn!" and disappears into the night before de Spain can stop him. He is never heard of again because he never appears in another Faulkner story. At least, though, he is one Snopes with a sense of moral value. Even "the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself, which had been bequeathed to him willy-nilly" was not enough to keep him from doing the decisive act because he "wanted only truth, justice."

Until the publication of *The Town*, Faulkner's most extensive treatment of the Snopeses was in *The Hamlet* (1940), which opens two years after the close of "Barn Burning," and gives many important details that the author could not include in the short story. Although this book is filled with some of the most unsavory characters in modern literature, Faulkner is careful not to present them all at the same level of amorality. Ratliff, Faulkner's point of view, says old Ab "aint naturally mean. He's just soured."

There was that business during the War. When he wasn't bothering nobody, not harming or helping either side, just tending to his own business, which was profit and horses — things which never even heard of a political conviction—when here comes someone who never even owned the horses and shot him in the heel and that soured him. (p. 33)

Ab's condition was aggravated by the treatment given him by Bayard and Ringo because they knew he had been responsible for the death of Miss Rosa Millard, Bayard's grandmother. They caught him in the woods and "something else happened, tied up to a tree or something and maybe even a heated ramrod in it too, though that's just hearsay. Anyway Ab had to withdraw his allegiance from the Sartorises." Without attempting to justify Ab's actions, one can see that Faulkner obviously intended to show that the barn burner was made by events that occurred during and immediately after the Civil War, that just as the War and Reconstruction rendered the Sartorises impotent, it made the Snopeses ruthless.

Much of *The Hamlet* is concerned with the meteoric rise of Flem. When he comes to Frenchman's Bend, he is "a thick squat soft man of no established age between twenty and thirty," whose only possessions are the clothes he wears. Less than a year later he is in complete charge of the Varner store and gin and owns a large herd of pure-bred Herefords. As Flem's economic status changes, he brings in several of his cousins to help him operate his many business establishments. Even the most cursory examination reveals many obvious differences between these cousins and their benefactor. When Eck, the blacksmith, first appears in Frenchman's Bend, Ratliff remarks that he has a quiet, empty face and appears harmless, that he is industrious, pleasant, accommodating, and generous. After Eck moves to Jefferson in *The Town*, he is discharged from his job in Flem's restaurant because he infers that the meat out of which he prepares hamburgers is not beef. A few years later he is literally killed by kindness. When a young boy is lost,



he joins the search and is killed when he holds a lighted lantern over an empty gas tank to see if the lad is inside.

There is evidence also to support the contention that Faulkner was not completely unsympathetic with Mink Snopes, despite the fact that Mink commits one of the most horrible and unnecessary crimes described in *The Saga*. Mink lives in an unpainted two-room shack on which he pays "nearly as much rent each year as it had cost to build." His crop, which is stunted because he has no money to buy fertilizer and hire help, is filled with grass because it has rained almost every day from May until July. As Faulkner expresses it (*The Hamlet*, p. 253), "It seems as if the Zodiac, too, had stacked the cards against him." Because of his inordinately small stature, even smaller than his wife's, he is convinced that nature has been unkind to him. When one considers, then, his deflated pride, and the many evidences of the world's injustice, his crime becomes more understandable and meaningful. The handsome, swaggering Houston symbolizes all the good fortune that fate has denied to Mink. When his fighting instinct is aroused because Houston has impounded one of his cows and his underlying suspicions of legal inequality are substantiated because the judge has fined him three dollars, Mink strikes back in the only manner his feeling of inferiority will allow him. He ambushes his antagonist. His motivation is far different from Flem's. Flem moves only for monetary reward or social gain. Mink's murder is an attempt to strike down the enemy who, as he sees it, will inevitably destroy him.

The most admirable Snopes, with the possible exception of Sarty, is Eck's son Wall Street Panic, whose career is described in greatest detail in *The Town*. An industrious boy, Wall works his way through high school by selling papers, delivering handbills, and doing odd jobs at a back-street grocery store. When his father is killed in an explosion, he takes the thousand-dollar insurance payment and purchases a half interest in the store. A few years later, at the age of nineteen, he buys out his partner. Steadfastly refusing Flem's offer to lend him money to expand his business, he is determined to make his way, as Ratliff expresses it, "by simple honesty and industry." And, like Benjamin Franklin, he succeeds by practicing these simple virtues. He establishes the first modern self-service grocery stores in Jefferson and later with Ratliff as partner, he owns a small chain of grocery stores and a warehouse to supply them. His is the typical American success story and none of his actions are characterized by the mean, conniving craftiness that one always associates with Flem's business practices.

No one can deny that O'Donnell's interpretation is valid, that it provides "one serious way of seeing [Faulkner's] work as a whole." Certainly no other commentary has influenced the opinions of other readers and critics as much as his. One must be careful, though, not to follow his suggestions too closely or he will fail to appreciate fully one of Faulkner's fundamental principles: A man's character is affected by his family background and by the times in which he lives. Faulkner's characters are not types; they are highly individualistic. Using the classical equivalents of white and black for good and evil, even the casual reader can see that Faulkner sketches his characters, even most of the Snopeses, in gray.



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## A Note On Faulkner's Negro Characters

WILLIAM FAULKNER'S TREATMENT of the Negro is one of the most interesting aspects of his art. In recent years Mr. Faulkner has spoken his mind freely in the columns of the national publications on the current problems of race relations, but Faulkner the artist and Faulkner the sociologist should not be confused. His handling of the Negro in fiction will be of moment when his informal statements on topical matters are no longer relevant.

The Negro is a much abused character in literature. In artists as various as Richard Wright and Thomas Nelson Page he tends to become the vehicle of an idea: his identity as a man is lost beneath his symbolical blackness. It is to William Faulkner's credit that he has perhaps more than any other American writer treated the Negro as a human being and not merely as the member of a race. A recent critic<sup>1</sup> has charged that in his early work he presented only the stereotyped Negro and that with Lucas Beauchamp in *Intruder in the Dust* he begins to look through the mask at the man. On the contrary, in Lucas Beauchamp, Faulkner comes near to losing the individual in the idea. Lucas is a man, a personalized human being; but his individuality is secondary to the overriding message that Faulkner tags onto this book. The reader feels that in this particular novel the theme, the moral if you will, was first conceived and afterwards the characters. Such a method is not usual in Faulkner.

The Negro character who is created with no social protest in mind is ultimately most satisfying as a human being. According to Faulkner's own figures, Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, has more Negroes than Whites;<sup>2</sup> and in the normal development of his saga he could not very well avoid the countless Negroes who live and work and play with no special grudge against the order of things. It is with

<sup>1</sup> Irene C. Edmonds, "Faulkner and the Black Shadow," *Southern Renaissance*, ed. Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs (Baltimore, 1953).

<sup>2</sup> According to the map of Yoknapatawpha County which Faulkner attaches to the first edition of *Absalom, Absalom!* the population is made up of 6298 Whites and 9313 Negroes.

these characters who appear briefly, and as it were in passing only, that Faulkner's skill in Negro characterization is best seen.

Old Job, the Negro handy man in a hardware store in Jefferson, makes three brief appearances in *The Sound and the Fury*. He has no significant part in the action of the story; he appears only as a foil to Jason Compson with whom he works. Because of the rich particularity of Faulkner's art, however, Old Job emerges as a triumphant human being in his own right. Jason Compson is one of the lowest characters whom Faulkner has drawn, and Old Job is well acquainted with him. Jason browbeats Job as they work together in the back of the store; and Job patiently accepts the unpleasant situation which he cannot escape. But Job is no fool, and his racial experience has taught him that, within carefully defined limits, he can fight back, even against a white man. At all times he keeps his self-respect, and at times he manages to declare his outrage at the white man's behaviour. He knows the ground he stands on, as only the Southern Negro can know it; and squatting among the screws, nuts, and bolts of his own domain in the back of the store, he does not budge an inch.

The Negro's way of self-assertion in Jefferson is not the white man's way. It has to be devious. The necessity for indirection in social relations has taught the Negro a tact, a subtlety, that most whites do not perceive. "You ought to be working for me," Jason tells Old Job. "Every other no-count nigger in town eats in my kitchen." "I works to suit de man whut pays me Sat'dy night," Job returns. "When I does dat it dont leave me a whole lot of time to please other folks." And then he screws up a nut. Job knows that even among Whites Jason is known as an unscrupulous person. He knows that his employer, Earl, hires him only through sympathy for Jason's invalid mother. But even so, this is pretty plain language for him to use to a white man. Job therefore does not leave his remark upended. After a pause, he says, "Aint nobody works much in dis country cep the boll-weevil, nowadays" (*The Sound and the Fury*, Modern Library, p. 207).

Job has just told Jason politely to mind his own business. He has said it indirectly, the only way a Negro can say such a thing to a Southern white man. He could have let the matter stand, when he screwed up the nut to register his verbal thrust; but he is aware of the danger of his exposed position. Before Jason has time to rally from Job's stab, Old Job parries. The business about the boll-weevil deflects the course of thought and softens the hard reality of Job's arrogant remark. Jason, on the defense now, accepts the parry and follows up the folksy matter of the boll-weevil with another remark on Old Job's laziness and the boll-weevil's industry. Job has made his point successfully; and preferring not to continue what could become an unpleasant game, he returns to amicability and to the stronghold of his Negro identity. His next remark is what a white man in Jefferson expects a Negro to say: "Dat's de troof. Boll-weevil got tough time. Work ev'y day in de week out in de hot sun, rain er shine. Aint got no front porch to set on en watch de watermilyuns growin and Sat'dy dont mean nothin a-tall to him" (p. 208).

On another occasion when Jason is lampooning Job because of his laziness, Job ignores his remarks to comment on a circus band passing up the street. Jason follows Job's train of thought and begins to denounce the circus for coming into town to rob the pockets of suckers like Job. "I dont begrudge um. I kin sho afford my two bits," Job says. Jason says two bits is only the beginning. How about the fifteen cents for a two cent box of candy? How about the time Job is wasting right now listening to that band? "Dat's de troof," Job says. "Well, ef I lives twell night hit's gwine to be two bits mo dey takin out of town, dat's sho." "Then you're a fool," Jason says. With this blunt remark Jason overshoots himself. He is not only cruel; he violates the rules of the casual and good-natured flyting exercise which the Negro expects from the white man. Jason knows he has gone too far, and Job knows that Jason knows. "Well I don't spute dat neither," he says, with proper humility; "but ef dat uz a crime all chain-gangs would-n't be black" (pp. 248-249). Without consideration of race, Job speaks simply as an outraged man. He repays Jason in kind and gets away with it because both men know that Jason has made the first breach of decorum. Jason ignores Job's remark. He is diverted by another matter and walks away, leaving Old Job master of the field.

Job is obviously designed as a touchstone to Jason Compson, to show that even the Jefferson Negroes know Jason for what he is. But Faulkner cannot draw an anonymous human being, a man who is simply Negro. His sense of concreteness is too strong. No matter how brief or insignificant the role, he invests with life and personality and human eccentricity whatever man he touches. In the brief scenes between Job and Jason, he shows how one Negro man, without violating the delicate social balance of the races in the South, holds his own with an overbearing white man. Old Job is only one example of the economy as well as the great richness of Faulkner's art. Only a writer who has identified himself completely with his own culture could say so much in so little space.

It is a mistake to think with many of our critics that the Negro in the South who meekly accepts the station in life to which Providence has called him has necessarily forfeited his dignity as a human being. Only a few men, black or white, rebel against the world they are born into. The Lucas Beauchamp who carries a gold toothpick in his mouth and a grudge in his heart is the exception, not the rule. Yet men, no matter how low their origin or difficult their lives, find ways of asserting their manhood. The Negro in the Southern caste system is no exception. His task is hard, for he knows that in his society his principal lot is to serve and obey; but experience has taught him that through humility and obedience he may also arrive at honor and dignity and pride. These are the attributes of manhood, and the well-fortuned of earth can hope for no more. In going beyond the accidents of color and race to the essential humanity of all men, William Faulkner has drawn some of the finest Negro characters in American literature.

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